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SUBJECT: SKY INTERVIEW SHOWS PARADOXES IN AFGHAN TRIBAL  
THINKING

Classified By: Political Counselor Ann E. Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4(b)  
) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Prince Ali Seraj of the Afghan royal family hosted a gathering of tribal elders and religious scholars on August 1st to share with us information on various tribe-related issues, the current political situation, and the recent developments in their home provinces. We unexpectedly shared the meeting with a SKY News correspondent. Embassy officers attended the event, but did not speak, except to ask one or two short questions. End Summary.

Pre-Meeting with Ali Seraj  
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¶2. (C) Before the gathering of tribal representatives began, Seraj met with Embassy officers to discuss the current state of affairs in the country, and the upcoming elections. Seraj said he believed the International Community (IC) was not taking the right approach to rebuilding Afghanistan because it was relying too much on working with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), and not enough on working with "the people". He argued the IC needed to build a strong foundation for the country by working directly with the people in the areas of security, personal freedoms, and basic economic development. Afghanistan, he said, could not be rebuilt in the image of the West - the tribes are a key element of Afghanistan, and must be engaged via the jirga system for rebuilding to succeed. IC representatives, he alleged, have not been meeting with the real senior elders - those elders are key leaders of their people, and will not meet with anyone below ambassador or minister-level representatives.

Tribesmen Gathering  
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¶3. (U) The tribal members we met represented a wide cross-section of tribes and ethnic groups, including Pashmayee, Safi, Nurestani, Turkmen, Babar Khani, Sarayee, Tajik, Mohmond, Kuchi, Arab, Pashtun, Ali Kheir, and Abdul Rahimzai. Seraj described the group as being composed of religious scholars (Ulema), tribal elders, and clerics. SKY News reporter Alex Crawford posed a series of questions to the assembly to elicit their thoughts on a wide variety of topics.

¶4. (U) On elections, the group said they were very interested in the election, and that almost all of them planned to participate and vote. They did not voice fears at that time over security, and said they were encouraging their people to participate.

Key Problems Facing Afghanistan  
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¶5. (U) The tribal representatives all agreed, however, that security was the greatest problem facing the country. When asked by Crawford, almost all of the representatives said

they wanted Coalition Forces to leave the country. They believed the departure of NATO/ISAF (including the United States) would promote peace in the country, and thus stability. They did not think Afghanistan needed international support to establish security, and said they wanted Islam to be the "strongest force" in Afghanistan. (Note: Though the participants did not say it directly, some seemed to believe the presence of NATO/ISAF was weakening Islam in Afghanistan. End Note). They asserted that security worsened after the arrival of international forces.

¶16. (U) The representatives believed faulty aid delivery was another problem. They said the Afghans had not received any benefit from the billions of dollars spent in the country, and that donors supported faulty (i.e. corrupt) leaders who used assistance money earmarked to help the people to enrich themselves. Those leaders are building their own cities and secure compounds, while investing in the drug trade, they alleged.

What Can The President Do?  
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¶17. (U) Crawford asked the representatives what they thought were the three most important things the Afghan president could do to establish peace. The most important item, they said, was to re-establish Afghan sovereignty, as they believed the IC controlled the government. Second, the president should order Coalition Forces to leave the country because their presence was causing the lack of peace. If any CF were to remain in the country, they should be dedicated to reconstruction, while security should be the purview of the

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Afghans. Third, they believed much of the money being sent to the Afghans had disappeared. They wanted the president to make sure assistance money went directly to the people. When Crawford asked the representatives if the IC had done any good at all in Afghanistan, they said they had not seen any.

International Versus Afghan Taliban  
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¶18. (U) While the tribal representatives pressed for the departure of NATO/ISAF, they also agreed the nation still needed international troops to suppress the militants and extremists. They said that if NATO/ISAF would work with and empower the tribes, the tribes could help establish peace in the nation. The representatives made a strict distinction between international militants (al Qaeda) and Afghan Taliban, whom they described as defenders of their villages. They argued that al Qaeda operatives were being sent to Afghanistan by "outsiders," and were being supported by an international mafia. They alleged that the IC in general, and the British in particular, was providing al Qaeda with weapons to continue their fight - particularly the British. The Taliban, however, are from the people. If the United States wants to lead the IC's efforts in Afghanistan, it must come to terms with these facts.

¶19. (U) Crawford asked the representatives for their thoughts on the Taliban. Was it a mistake, she asked, to get rid of the Taliban government? The representatives replied that the Taliban of eight years ago were Pakistanis sponsored by the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency. The representatives were happy the foreign Taliban had been removed, but complained that many Afghan Taliban had been lost too. The people are tired of fighting. Some of the representatives said they wanted Seraj appointed leader so that he could bring peace. They believed he would promote good governance in the nation, and fight corruption. They said if the United States wanted continued unrest in the nation, it should continue to support the corrupt officials and warlords of the current regime.

¶10. (U) The representatives claimed that 70% of the Taliban

belonged to the tribal groups these representatives controlled. They claimed that if they told the Afghan Taliban to put down their weapons, they would do so. The Afghan Taliban, they argued, were fighting the corruption of the warlords now controlling Afghanistan. Were Seraj made president, he could call the Taliban back to reconcile, they claimed. When asked by Crawford, the representatives said they believed Gulbuddin Hekmatyar should also be reconciled and brought in to GIROA.

#### Way Forward

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¶11. (U) The tribesmen told Crawford the first goal of the next Afghan president must be to establish peace. The president must bring the corrupt to justice and establish larger Ulema Councils to give him advice on how to proceed. He should also establish a tribal council to advise him on the people's concerns, and to help him quell the violence. Finally, they said, only a true Islamic government could bring peace to the nation. Mullah Omar was fighting the foreigners because of their presence in an Islamic country. If the foreigners left, there would be no need to fight. However, they didn't trust Omar either - they believed the ISI was using him against the Afghan people.

¶12. (U) The tribesmen told Crawford that while they did not seek a resurrection of the Taliban government of 10 years ago, which was supported by the ISI against the Afghans, they would welcome a government of Afghan Taliban tomorrow since it would be truly Islamic. They did not believe a democratic government that was hostile to Islamic law would be acceptable to the Muslims. They told Crawford there were three types of Taliban in Afghanistan: 1) those supported by the British government; 2) those supported by the Pakistani government; and 3) those fighting for their villages. Only the family of Zahir Shah, the former king, could unite the Afghan people.

¶13. (U) Seraj spoke up and told Crawford the Afghans would never make deals to diminish their religion, their independence, their country or their tribes. The representatives agreed and said the Afghans did need IC assistance, but not in the form of weapons. The Afghans need food, and to be treated with respect. If the IC treated them as brothers and equals, they said, Afghanistan would never be a haven for terrorists.

¶14. (C) In an aside after Crawford's interview, Seraj ended the meeting by telling EmbOffs that if Abdullah Abdullah and

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Ashraf Ghani continued to incite the people, there could be a blood-bath after the elections if Karzai won. The USG must hold them responsible if such a result occurs, and must tell them it will do so. Abdullah and Ghani must be made to say they do not want to see unrest after the election, no matter who wins, Seraj said.

¶15. (C) Comment: Crawford's questions seemed to be designed to highlight a negative area in the relationship between Afghans and the IC. They also served to point out the paradoxes in the representatives' thinking. As noted above, the tribesmen were unanimous in their desire for the IC to leave Afghanistan, especially the Coalition Forces. Almost in the next breath, however, they desired our help to suppress the militants, and the IC's help in rebuilding the nation. They condemned the Karzai government and supported the appointment of Seraj as leader, though he is not a candidate and has pledged support to Karzai. The purpose of this event seemed to be two-fold: to allow the tribesmen to voice their dissatisfaction to a member of the international press and to highlight a possible future role for Seraj as peacemaker. He has often in the past denied his desire to be president, but has spoken of himself as someone who could act as go-between for the Afghan tribes and the IC. Such a role

would certainly enhance his prestige, and could be parlayed  
to feed his future aspirations. End Comment.  
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